

HOUSE DEMOCRATS INTRODUCE BILL TO PROVIDE QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL AMERICANS

Tuesday, 14 July 2009

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HOUSE DEMOCRATS INTRODUCE BILL TO PROVIDE QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL AMERICANS

Bill Covers 97 Percent of Americans, Embodies President Obama's Goals of Lower Costs, More Choices, and Access to Quality, Affordable Care

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Chairmen of the three Committees with jurisdiction over health policy in the U.S. House of Representatives introduced comprehensive health care reform legislation today that will reduce out-of-control costs, encourage competition among insurance plans to improve choices for patients, and expand access to quality, affordable health care for all Americans.

The legislation is consistent with President Obama's overall goals of building on what works within the current health care system by strengthening employer-provided care, while fixing what is broken. The bill will ensure that 97 percent of Americans will be covered by a health care plan that is both affordable and offers quality, standard benefits.

The House Committees on Education and Labor, Ways and Means, and Energy and Commerce have been working together in an unprecedented way as one committee to develop the proposal for health care reform. This week each of the three committees will be marking up the legislation, allowing for continued input from members of Congress and the American people.

"I am proud to join with my colleagues to introduce America's Affordable Health Choices Act. This bill meets President Obama's call for health reform that provides coverage for all, promotes delivery system reforms, and controls costs," said U.S. Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), the Chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health. "Our committee will begin markup this week and have a bill for members to approve before the August recess."

"Reforming America's health care system to control costs and improve access to quality affordable care is not only the moral thing to do, it is also critical to our economic recovery and the long-term fiscal health of our nation," said U.S. Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee Chairman. "Health care costs are rising out of control, threatening the economic well-being of American families and businesses. This innovative bill provides a uniquely American solution to control costs and put patients first without burdening future generations with debt."

"Today we are taking another step forward towards fulfilling our commitment to deliver what the American people decisively voted for last November — access to affordable, quality health insurance for all Americans," said U.S. Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA), the Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee. "This bill is among our highest legislative priorities this year. We have taken great care to build on what we have that works and reform what doesn't. I look forward to working with my colleagues to refine the bill as it moves through the Committee process. I am confident that we will succeed in enacting this landmark reform into law."

"American families cannot afford for Washington to say 'no' once again to comprehensive health care reform," said U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. "We are proud to introduce legislation that meets the goals articulated by President Obama — to lower costs, preserve choice, and expand access to quality, affordable health care — while strengthening our economic and fiscal health. We will continue to work with our colleagues in the weeks ahead to deliver the fundamental reforms that the American people want, need and deserve."

"I'm pleased by the progress we've made on the America's Affordable Health Choices Act. Across the political spectrum — from liberal to conservative with moderates in between — everyone knows health care is a major part of our current economic crisis," said U.S. Rep. John Dingell (D-MI), the Chairman

Emeritus of the Energy and Commerce Committee. “If left unfixed, our health care crisis will cause the next great economic catastrophe. We can’t afford to let medical costs continue to rise. We can’t afford to leave people in a system that looks to recruit the healthy and leave the sick uninsured, underinsured or uncertain about their insurance. The current broken health care system will not fix itself and the people who made billions from it have no reason to change their ways unless we make them. The bill will address many of the problems we’ve heard from Americans whether they live in rural or urban communities, or are employed by small businesses and large factories. What we know now is that we must get something done.”

“People have talked about the need for health care reform for decades, but today that talk is being converted into action,” said U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) the Chairman of Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health. “This plan will produce historic change but making history does not come easily. It’s taken a lot of hard work and we have more work to do. This is a giant step forward that puts affordable and quality health care within reach of every American and puts our country back on track to fiscal sustainability.”

“Today we are pleased to announce a plan designed to free financial waste within our health care system and get costs under control. This effort ensures that Americans receive better care for their dollar and paves the way for economic growth,” said U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews (D-NJ), the Chairman of the Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee. “While government, businesses and insured Americans continue to bear the heavy financial burden for those who cannot afford coverage, limiting costs will free up the resources necessary to revitalize our economy, put Americans back to work, and expand health care to millions of struggling uninsured Americans.”

The key principles of legislation include:

Increasing choice and competition. First, the bill will protect and improve consumers’ choices.

- If an individual likes their current plan, they will be able to keep it.

- For individuals who either aren’t currently covered, or wanted to enroll in a new health care plan, the proposal will establish a health care exchange where consumers can select from a menu of affordable, quality health care options: either a new public health insurance plan or a plan offered by private insurers. People will have similar choices that members of Congress have.

- This new marketplace will reduce costs, create competition that leads to better care for every American, and keep private insurers honest. Patients and doctors will have control over decisions about their health care, instead of insurance companies.

Giving Americans peace of mind. Second, the legislation will ensure that Americans have portable, secure health care plans — so that they won’t lose care if their employer drops their plan or they lose their job.

- Every American who receives coverage through the exchange will have a plan that includes standardized, comprehensive and quality health care benefits.

- It will end increases in premiums or denials of care based on pre-existing conditions, age, race, or gender.

- The proposal will also eliminate co-pays for preventative care, cap out-of-pocket expenses, and guarantee catastrophic coverage that protects every American from bankruptcy.

Improving quality of care for every American. Third, the legislation will ensure that Americans of all ages, from young children to retirees have access to greater quality of care by focusing on prevention, wellness, and strengthening programs that work.

- Guarantees that every child in America will have health care coverage that includes dental and vision benefits.

- Provides better preventative and wellness care. Every health care plan offered through the exchange will cover preventative care.
- Grows the health care workforce to ensure that more doctors and nurses are available to provide quality care as more Americans get coverage.
- Strengthens Medicare and Medicaid so that seniors and low-income Americans receive better quality of care and see lower prescription drug costs and out-of-pocket expenses.

Ensuring shared responsibility. Fourth, the bill will ensure that individuals, employers, and the federal government all share responsibility for a quality and affordable health care system.

- Employers who currently offer coverage will be able to continue offering coverage to workers. Employers who don't currently offer coverage could choose to cover their workers or pay a penalty.
- All individuals would be required to get coverage, either through their employer or the exchange, or pay a penalty.
- The federal government will provide affordability credits, available on a sliding scale for low- and middle-income individuals and families to make premiums affordable and reduce cost-sharing.

Protecting consumers and reducing waste, fraud, and abuse. Fifth, the legislation will put the interests of consumers first, protect them from any problems in getting and keeping health care coverage, and reduce waste, fraud, and abuse.

- Provides complete transparency in plans in the health exchange so that consumers have the clear, complete information needed to select the plan that best meets their needs.
- Establishes Consumer Advocacy Offices as part of the exchange in order to protect consumers, answer questions, and assist with any problems related to their plans.
- Will identify and eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse by simplifying paperwork and other administrative burdens. Patients, doctors, nurses, insurance companies, providers, and employers will all encounter a streamlined, less confusing, more consumer friendly system.

To view detailed fact sheets and more information on what the health care reform discussion draft means for American families, [CLICK HERE](#)

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